

**Before the  
Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the matter of	)	
	)	
2002 Biennial Regulatory Review – Review	)	MB Docket No. 02-277
of the Commission’s Broadcast Ownership	)	
Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to	)	
Section 202 of the Telecommunications Act of	)	
1996	)	
	)	MM Docket No. 01-235
Cross-Ownership of Broadcast Stations and	)	
Newspapers	)	
	)	MM Docket No. 01-317
Rules and Policies Concerning Multiple	)	
Ownership of Radio Broadcast Stations	)	
in Local Markets	)	
	)	MM Docket No. 00-244
Definition of Radio Markets	)	

**Questions Submitted by**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

On Sept. 11, our nation was changed forever by the terrorist attacks against the United States. While terrorism is not a new phenomenon in our country, the magnitude of the attacks and the total loss of life were unprecedented. Anxious U.S. residents were overwhelmed with questions, trying to understand what had occurred. In record numbers they turned to the news media for answers.

The central role played by the news media in informing the public during those critical days after Sept. 11 reminded all U.S. residents of the core mission of journalism in a democratic society.

Throughout the years, many influential journalists and scholars have warned about the decline in journalism. They have warned that the pressures corporate owners, who run the giant major conglomerates, place on their news executives to increase profits has led to the dumbing down of news coverage.

In recent years, many news organizations have done away with coverage that is crucial to keeping the public informed. They have downsized their newsroom staffs and coverage, by closing down city, state, national and foreign bureaus, to reduce costs.

The news media have also failed in their journalistic mission to ensure that all segments of our society are covered. By the year 2050, people of color will make up 50 percent of the U.S. population. Hispanics will make up more than half of the U.S. population by the

end of the century. Yet communities of color continue to be marginalized by news coverage and people of color continue to be severely underrepresented as owners of broadcast properties.

The events of Sept. 11 should weigh heavily on the minds of the FCC commissioners as they rewrite the nation's broadcast ownership rules. The commission must consider how the new rules will affect news coverage and the information needs of our society. We are concerned the commission has not devoted enough time to examining how these changes will affect the quality of news the public receives. We urge the FCC to take seriously the criticisms of journalists, media executives and scholars who have warned us about the decline of journalism.

### **THE ROLE OF JOURNALISM**

We believe the FCC has not spent enough time examining the role and function of news in our society or how rewriting the broadcast ownership regulations will affect the quality of news being produced. While the definition of news is subjective, there are areas the FCC can examine in which media consolidation has affected news services to the U.S. public.

As Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel wrote in *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*, "The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self governing."

We question whether the news media are failing in their primary role. The dominant news organizations are now owned by a handful of large media-entertainment conglomerates, but the news divisions of those conglomerates constitute smaller and smaller parts of the overall companies.

In their book, *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril*, Leonard Downie, the executive editor of The Washington Post and Robert Kaiser, the associate editor of The Washington Post, wrote: “Too much of what has been offered as news in recent years has been untrustworthy, irresponsible, misleading or incomplete...But the most alarming weakness of the news media have been systemic, and they have seriously undermined good journalism. Too many of those who own and lead the nation’s news media have cynically underestimated or ignored America’s need for good journalism and evaded their responsibility to provide it.”

Downie and Kaiser wrote about the quality of network news: “The television networks haven’t been in the business of making citizens well informed. Their business is assembling big audiences to whom products can be marketed by advertisers. Aggressive coverage of the news was never central to that mission, and in the nineties it became less important than ever before. By 2000 the news was an opportunity, not an obligation – an opportunity to draw more eyeballs to the networks’ commercials.”

The authors also added the following about the mission of local television newscasts:

“Local television news does little original reporting of significant community issues, because news directors and producers doubt that viewers have the interest or patience to watch longer, more complicated stories, especially if they lack vivid video. Instead, event-driven crime and disaster coverage — with weather, sports, health, consumer and entertainment news — dominates their newscasts. News directors believe these subjects attract the most viewers, who in turn attract the advertisers needed to produce profit margins of 40 to 50 percent or more. Completing a vicious circle, maintaining those profit margins means keeping news staffs small, which leaves the handful of reporters on duty each day little, if any time, to cover local government or politics, business, education, environment or social issues that most affect people living in the communities they serve. At most stations, these subjects just aren’t taken seriously anyway — they aren’t part of the accepted formula for local television news.”

James Fallows wrote in his book, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*, “Bottom-line pressure — for survival in newspapers, for increased ratings and profits in TV — has made editors more like managers, and has made reporters more conscious of increasing their flexibility and salability. These are sound concepts in most businesses but can put the wrong kind of pressure on schools, or military units, or news organizations. These changes matter to the American public because they have weakened the media’s ability to tell us what we need to know.”

Legendary journalist Pete Hamill, in his book, *News is a Verb: Journalism at the End of the Twentieth Century*, criticizes the state of U.S. newspapers and places much of the blame for their decline on newspaper chains that are more interested in profit than sound journalism.

He wrote: “In addition, more newspapers are now in the hands of faceless chains or individual amateurs; both seem to believe that the abstract management techniques of other business – cereals, real estate, parking lots – can be applied without penalty to newspapers. Licensed by publishers, MBAs have been granted positions of power in many newsrooms. These men and women, who have never been reporters, depend upon polling and focus groups to shape the news package. They are responsible for the endless meetings, with their charts and abstractions that consume so much time that was once used by editors to inspire and instruct the young and push the seasoned veterans to better stories. They slice and pare and trim in the name of the holy bottom line, extol the virtues of “reader-driven” journalism in the process witlessly reduce the possibilities for long-range growth... With the usual honorable exceptions, newspapers are getting dumber.”

### **MEDIA COVERAGE AND PEOPLE OF COLOR**

Latinos and people of color have historically been marginalized by the news media. Many Hispanic journalists are concerned this trend will worsen with further consolidation.

We believe the failure of the media to cover issues affecting people of color is due in large part to the lack of journalists of color working at daily newspapers and at television and radio stations. We believe newsroom diversity is necessary in creating the intellectual diversity needed to ensure that the media cover the entire community.

While Latinos currently make up 12.5 percent of the U.S. population, they make up just 6.1 percent of all newsroom employees working at local English-language TV stations, 2.4 percent of all newsroom personnel working at radio stations, and 3.8 percent of all newsroom employees working at daily newspapers.

We have no idea how many people of color work at the networks. The networks have refused to provide this information. We estimate there are 6,000 network news jobs. They are among the most coveted and influential positions in the news industry. If we are going to trust the networks with the public airwaves, we should know the ethnic and racial make-up of their newsrooms.

In December, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists released its 7<sup>th</sup> Annual *Network Brownout Report*, which found that less than 1 percent of all news stories on the network evening newscasts of ABC, CBC, NBC and CNN were about Latinos. In these stories, Latinos tend to be portrayed stereotypically as illegal immigrants overrunning the border and people who were prone to violence.

The NAHJ is concerned about how news organizations determine their news coverage and whether the coverage is based on trying to attract the most desirable demographic groups for advertisers.

Kovach and Rosenstiel have noted that many newspapers and television stations have crafted news coverage in order to target a more affluent audience rather than the largest. For television that meant targeting news for women 18 to 49 and for newspapers that meant limiting circulation to the more affluent zip codes.

They noted: “It also meant the paper or TV station could ignore certain parts of the community in its coverage, which saved money. Isolation, in other words, became a business plan. After the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* dropped in circulation by 4 percent in three years in the mid-1990s, publisher Joel Kramer told *The New York Times*, ““We are a healthier business because we are charging readers more and accepting a somewhat smaller circulation.””

We are also concerned that the news media does not quote Latinos in news stories unless it is a story about Latinos. The NAHJ’s annual Network Brownout Report found a dramatic increase in the percentage of Latinos interviewed in Latino-related stories. The percentage climbed from 24 percent in 2000 to 67 percent in 2002. But the use of Latinos as interview subjects in general is abysmal. A study released by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting in June of 2002 found that 92 percent of all U.S. news sources who were interviewed on the nightly newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC in 2001 were white. It also found that out of 14,632 sources, only 7 percent were black, 0.6 percent were Latino, and 0.2 percent were Asian.



While people of color make up more than 30 percent of the U.S. population, they only make up 3.8 percent of all radio and television owners in the country. Most own AM radio stations. Latinos own only 1.8 percent of all radio stations and 0.1 of all TV stations. We question whether the informational needs of Latinos and people of color would be better served if more people of color owned broadcast stations.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN REWRITING THE BROADCAST**

### **OWNERSHIP RULES**

The NAHJ is submitting the following questions to the FCC as the commission moves forth in rewriting the broadcast ownership rules. We urge the FCC to examine closely the critical importance of news in our society, particularly at this moment in our nation's history.

#### **Questions regarding the news operations of network news**

As the news outlets proliferate but ownership consolidates, how has news reporting changed? What types of stories are being produced? How has this changed since 1980?

Given that we live in an increasingly globalized economy, are the networks covering more international news? Are the number of foreign bureaus increasing or decreasing? Where are they located? Where were bureaus eliminated?

Do the networks or major television companies have more bureaus nationally? Have the size of bureaus increased or decreased? Where are they located? Where were bureaus eliminated?

Do the networks and/or major television companies have more or less reporters devoted to covering specific beats? Do the networks have more or less reporters devoted to covering the various agencies of the federal government? How has that changed over the past 20 years and how does that change relate to the statutory requirements of broadcasters to serve the “public interest, convenience, or necessity?”

Are the networks relying on more stories from news services?

How much time is devoted to covering the issues of political campaigns and candidates?

How has the average story length changed? How has it changed for specific types of stories, such as international news coverage?

Are reporters being asked to cover more stories? What is the average number of stories a network correspondent covered in 1980 compared to 2000? Are there more or less network reporters today than there were in 1980?

Are the networks providing more public affairs programming? What are the time slots being allotted for public affairs programs?

How many companies that own news organizations have a committee on their board devoted to journalism accountability?

Does the media company that owns a network have a board of directors? Are there any Latinos and other people of color serving on the board? Does the company have an advisory board? Are there any Latinos and people of color on the advisory board?

How much profit do the network news divisions earn for their networks? How much of the profit is put back into the news budget? How have network newsroom budgets increased or decreased from 1980?

Are journalists required to produce more stories for various media properties owned by their companies, such as on-line news sites?

Do the networks use market research to help decide news coverage?

Do the networks produce certain news stories to attract a specific demographic? Does the affluence of the viewers help determine the type of stories that are produced? What variables, if any, such as sex, wealth, race and age, influence what stories are produced and aired?

### **Questions about the news operations of local TV stations**

As the news industry consolidates, how has news reporting of local newscasts changed?

What are the trends in the types of stories covered by local newscasts?

How many hours of news do local stations produce in a day, week and year? Are there more reporters being hired at stations that have increased their newscast? What is the average number of reporters working at local stations? What is it for each market? How many stories are reporters required to cover during the course of a day, week and year? How has that changed from 1980? How has that changed from 1990?

Are local newscasts covering more foreign news? Are they covering the local government in their viewing area and its agencies? Are they covering state and national news stories? How much time is devoted to covering local political campaigns and politicians? What types of stories are being covered?

What is the average story length on a newscast? What is the average story length for the various topics covered such as politics and education?

How often do local stations use wire stories in its coverage?

Are local stations devoting more time to public affairs programming? What segments of society are they serving? What are the time slots being allotted for public affairs programs?

How many companies that own local TV stations have a board committee devoted to journalism accountability?

What is the ethnic and racial make up of the geographic area served by the station?

Does the media company that owns a local station have a board of directors? Are there any Latinos and other people of color serving on the board? Does the company or station have a community advisory board? Are there any Latinos and people of color on the advisory board?

How profitable are local news programs? How have newsroom budgets increased or decreased?

Do the local newscasts use market research to help decide news coverage? Do the local newscasts produce news geared to attracting a specific demographic? What variables, if any, such as sex, wealth, race and age, influence what stories are produced and aired?

Are journalists required to produce more news stories for various media properties owned by their companies, such as on-line news sites?

### **Questions for the news operations of local radio stations**

As the news industry consolidates, how has news reporting at radio stations changed?

What are the trends in news coverage?

How has the rise of giant chains, such as Clear Channel, affected the “public interest, convenience or necessity” of the local communities in which those chains own radio stations?

Are the numbers of radio stations with news departments increasing or decreasing?

What is the average number of reporters working in the news departments of local radio stations? What is the average by market?

Are radio stations covering local, state, national and international news? Are they covering local or state agencies? Are stations covering local, state and national politicians and political campaigns?

Are more radio stations with news departments devoting time to public affairs programming? What segments of society does the programming represent? Is public affairs programming airing on local stations produced by the station?

Are local stations devoting more time to news, or less?

Are local radio stations producing original news reporting or are they relying on news services? How many stories are reporters asked to cover in a day, week, month and year?

Are local radio stations relying on market research to determine what news stories they will air?

How many companies that own radio stations with news departments have a board committee devoted to journalism accountability?

How profitable are local radio newscasts and public affairs programming to the station?  
What is the average budget for the news department? What's the average per market?

Are journalists required to cover more stories for various media properties owned by their companies, such as on-line news sites?

Are stories covered by local radio newscasts determined by the type of demographic audience the station is trying to attract? What variables, if any, such as sex, wealth, race and age, influence what stories are produced and aired?

What is the ethnic and racial make up of the geographic area served by the station?

Does the media company that owns a local station have a board of directors? Are there any Latinos and other people of color serving on the board? Does the company or station have a community advisory board? Are there any Latinos and people of color on the advisory board?

How many Hispanic-owned stations have news departments? Do those stations have newscasts or public affairs programming? Is news coverage geared toward covering the Latino community? How big are the reporting staffs? What are the issues covered on the newscasts?

### **Questions for newspapers**

In cities where convergence has taken place, how has news coverage changed at the daily newspaper? Has the newsroom staff increased or decreased? Has the amount of news covered daily increased or decreased? What types of stories are covered? Has the paper eliminated city, state, national and international bureaus? Has the newsroom budget increased or decreased? Has the paper become more profitable? Are reporters filing stories for the newspaper and broadcast station? Has the number of beats increased or decreased? What is the average number of stories reporters have to file in a day, week, month and year? What is the ethnic and racial make up of the geographic area served by the newspaper? Are the papers relying on market research to determine what news stories to cover? Are stories that are covered determined by the type of demographic audience



the paper is trying to attract? What variables, if any, such as sex, wealth, race and age, influence what stories are covered?

Does the media company that owns the newspaper have a board of directors? Are there any Latinos and other people of color serving on the board? Does the company have a community advisory board? Are there any Latinos and people of color on the advisory committee?